

Minutes of the Library Advisory Committee (LAC)

For the Montgomery County Correctional Facility (MCCF)

For October 18, 2018

The meeting, held at the Rockville Memorial Library, was called to order by LAC Chair, Kathy Lorr, who had a check-in. Attendees included LAC members Frank Joseph, Mier Wolf, Patricia Hulsebosch and Richard Lorr; James Donaldson, Acting Assistant Director, Collection and Technology of Montgomery County Public Library (MCPL) and Interim MCCF Library Manager; and Tanner Wray, MCPL Liaison to the LAC. The minutes of the September 17 meeting were read and, after corrections were made, approved. James determined that we could have the next meeting, November 19, at the same location.

1. **Membership Report.** Kathy reported that she had asked Gale and Christine if they could identify someone knowledgeable about the library from the existing pool of volunteers at the MCCF who might be interested in joining the LAC. Although they responded that no one immediately came to mind, Kathy agreed to go back to them on this. The LAC has also asked Gale Starkey and Denise Habib if they could identify a former inmate to join the board. The person would have to be out of incarceration for at least 90 days. No such person has yet been identified. At the last meeting, the LAC discussed Gale's approval that a current MCCF inmate may attend LAC meetings for a period of 15 minutes/meeting. Denise agreed to locate a pool of 1 to 3 inmates for this purpose, and we hope to have an inmate attend our next meeting at MCCF (which is December 10). Some discussion occurred about the mechanics of that proposal including a purpose it might serve. Kathy urged LAC members to recruit more members with an eye toward more diversity on the committee. Mier reminded the LAC that the Clarksburg Chamber of Commerce offered to have the LAC make a presentation; he offered to go back to them and ask for dates. Frank said he has 2 people in mind for membership. Pat and Kathy offered to seek people at their church who have an interest in incarceration as members.
2. **Interim Library Manager's Report.** Jail staffing is an ongoing subject for the LAC. James reported that a new substitute had been found to provide part-time help, and will begin working there soon; the requirements and salary for this position were discussed. To better understand the MCCF library's operations, James provided the weekly schedule for the library's use. To meet the inmates' constitutional rights to services, the schedule is intense and requires an intense workload. Unlike a regular library, inmates must submit blue slips to Denise for services, a mediated (and time-consuming) service request which they can't do themselves. There was a discussion of bolstering legal help for inmates who self-represent in the legal system. Frank asked if it would be possible to host "Ask a Lawyer" sessions. A question was raised about volunteer lawyers or contacting the MC Bar Association if that has not already been done. The LAC agreed we need a presentation on how the law library works and if lawyers are currently making presentations to inmates. The LAC is eagerly awaiting the appointment of a new MCCF Library Manager; the job has been vacant since January 2018. James is hopeful about the current status of the hiring process, but stated that if they have further difficulties in the larger search process in finding someone who wants to work at MCCF, they can hire out

of the pool of Senior Library Managers at MCPL. Mier expressed concern that the library is closed on the weekends, and James said he would ask Gale about this.

3. **Library Board Liaison Report:** Tanner reported that a Joint Meeting on the budget and PL advocacy would occur on November 7 and urged LAC members to attend. He noted that in recent history the Board has restored open hours for a number of libraries and also ended book overdue fines for children's books as a mechanism to support library use by low income families. (If there's a \$5 fine families stop coming to the library.) Tanner urged LAC members to ask those running for the position of County Executive questions like: "What do you think about MCPL libraries?"; "Will you commit to funding PL?" and "Do you understand how important PL are to fighting the achievement gap?" Tanner stated he was pleased to recognize the work of our LAC by nominating us for the Eleanor Ablard Award which recognizes that our Poetry Program effectively links the LAC, the Library, and our community of users. This collaboration between County departments in MCPL and MCCF and the involved community members, e.g., the LAC, poets and writers within the jail and in our larger community (E. Ethelbert Miller and other recognized poets and writers) improves the lives of MCCF inmates in a meaningful way that will hopefully impact the larger MC community as well upon their release.
4. **Report on Book Donations.** Pat noted that we continue to look for paperback books to donate to the jail library. Only 30% of them stay with the library, the rest go with the inmates so there is a constant need. She keeps an eye out for book sales. Bethesda-Chevy Chase HS is committed and she is working with the Takoma Park FOL.

New Business: The LAC confirmed the dates for its meetings (set forth on the agenda) through next April 8, 2019. We discussed the following goals, priorities, and activities for this year:

- **Goal: Increase awareness of and advocacy to address MCCF PL staffing shortages.** Frank drafted a letter to the Library Board (copy to MCPL). Everyone agreed to send him comments in track changes and the letter will be on the agenda for our next meeting so that it can be finalized and Tanner can carry it forward to the Board for their December discussion.
- **Goal: Deepen our understanding of library needs.** As previously noted, a discussion of what inmate participation in LAC meetings will look like will be on the next agenda in preparation for the hoped-for inmate participation during our December 10 meeting at MCCF. In addition, Richard presented a proposed survey of inmates to learn how they use the library, what features they like, and where improvements could occur. He agreed to forward the survey so that everyone can provide feedback, and the survey can be on our next agenda. Tanner can also carry forward our survey for Board approval in December.
- **Goal: Increase awareness of MCCF PL, for example, through liaison with the Friends of the Library.** At Frank's invitation, Ari Brooks will attend our next meeting; we will put her on the agenda for 11:30. Discussion of FOL participation in our meetings. James reminded us that cooperation with FOL cannot include fund raising for personnel salaries. However, FOL may be an important source of book donations and funds for stipends for writers and readers. This will assist with our next goal:
- **Goal: Continue to cultivate sources for book donations.** It was suggested that perhaps, parallel to the way funds may be proposed to the FOL through MCPL, our Library Manager could propose that FOL provide MCCF books from FOL bookstores. FOL

generally provides for library needs that are not in the budget, e.g., computers or stipends. We can ask Ari Brooks whether we can work with FOL as a whole or with particular FOL libraries for book donations. Also, can/should we set up a process to access books based on the cash value of those books?

- **Goal: Regularize and expand the Poetry Program, and bring more poets and writers to MCCF for readings and discussions of books and writing.** Mier will coordinate with Ethelbert to figure out a possible stipend for him, for poets he provides to the Poetry Program, and for other writers and poets who read at scheduled events at MCCF. Frank and Kathy will work on asking Gale for specific dates for readings at upcoming 2019 holidays (Mother's Day, Father's Day, etc. so that these can be scheduled in advance.

Submitted by

Mier Wolf  
Secretary Pro Tem  
October 2, 2018